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Philosophy of Education

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“Who are you?” This is a question I have encountered many times throughout my life and it always seems to catch me off guard. It is a question that requires a far more complex answer than its simplicity suggests. Our lives are a series of events that define who we are and we are forever changing because of this. Therefore who I am today is not the same person as I was yesterday, and tomorrow I will be different than today. Moreover, this series of events and occurrences continue to add up making one extremely unique and individual in so many ways and for so many reasons. With both of these things in mind I truly believe that we never find out who we really are until we are much, much older. Some people never figure out who they are. However, when it comes to my career path choice, as of now, I can answer that. As cliché as it sounds, I always pretended that I was a teacher when I was really little and my parents told me that’s all I would say I wanted to be when I grew up, but that dream faded sometime around my middle school years. I decided that I wanted to be doctor or a psychiatrist. I was obsessed with Psychology, Health, Biology, and Anatomy and Physiology. When I got into college, though, I soon discovered my true passion, for now anyway, is Health in general and wanting to teach health to others. My freshman year of college was your run of the mill first year experience. That being said, I was slowly becoming less healthy until one day I finally noticed how unhealthy I was getting. Not only was I becoming very unhealthy, but the people around me were as well.

I thought back to all my years of schooling and what sorts of health classes were offered. When it came down to it, health was almost non-existent throughout my K-12 career. Health, something that affects us from the moment we are conceived until our death only gets one semester in high school. That is not nearly enough time to teach everything one should know about overall health and health components. I realized the reason I and so many of the people around me were becoming so unhealthy is

because we were not fully equipped with the knowledge we need to live on our own. This made me want to educate others about the importance of being healthy overall, beyond eating right and daily exercise.

Health is a subject that I believe should be taught every year. There are so many aspects of health that a comprehensive approach would be the most beneficial. Sadly I will most likely be teaching in the middle and high school levels. This is not a bad thing in my eyes; I think we can learn more about our health every year, every day even. I say sadly because I believe that health education is important for all ages, yet most schools don't start teaching the subject until grades 6-12. Either way, I will still be excited and passionate about teaching health regardless of whom I am educating, because as I have said before, it no matter what age you are, there is still something new to learn about health. I plan to teach much more than what everyone perceives as standard health education. Yes, I will discuss nutrition, exercise, and sexual education, but I will also teach much more. I want to help students discover who they are, find answers within them. When it comes to the actual act of teaching, I believe that every student is capable of passing, with an A. I will make this idea come alive, too, with personalized lesson plans. It is important for me to remember that, just as I am an individual, each one of my students is an individual as well. Everyone has individual needs which include learning styles and preferences. It is important to take this into account when teaching your class. When considering how I will teach, I stand by the notion that I am not only a teacher, but I am a student as well. I constantly think about lesson plans and other classroom activities in both frames of mind. I think that a key component of being a successful teacher is understanding how your students think and learn.

As you can see, when it comes to *why* I want to teach, it was the decline in my own health as well as the health of the people around me paired with a lack of general health knowledge. The question of *how* I will teach and why I will teach this way was influenced by completely different factors. Some of my teaching styles have been influenced by past teachers I have had. Some were great and some were sub-par, but I still learned valuable lessons from each. I see my entire school career as an internship almost. I have been able to observe numerous teachers, being able to use each teacher as a resource of

how I would like my ideal classroom atmosphere, including set up and my actual teaching style. It is pretty amazing, I feel very lucky, not many people get to intern or shadow a professional from their dream job for a year, let alone seventeen years.

The teachers I have had in the past have been just one of the major influences on my philosophy of education. Courses I have taken throughout my school career, especially during my college years, have influenced my philosophy of education as well. Throughout my years of being a student I got to see what worked for me and what did not work for me when it came to learning, mastery, and assessments. Having to take general education courses also shaped my philosophy of education and my decisions about teaching strategies I will use. I have excelled in some classes and done horribly in others. This, I feel, gives me a sense of empathy for my students. I understand what it is like to struggle through a specific class for an entire semester and I think that this understanding can help me connect and get to the root of the problem of why a student is having a difficult time comprehending the material. In general, people learn more from their successes rather than their failures. I believe that all students are capable of being successful, we (as teachers) need to give them the tools and knowledge to do so, though. These factors have molded my philosophy of education and have shaped the person I am today. My priority and desire as a teacher is the success of my students. I am becoming a teacher to help people learn and grow, not just in terms of general health, but as human beings, in every aspect of living. I want to lead them on a journey of self-discovery and show them that they truly are capable of so many things they may have doubted themselves about before.

Many of the courses I have taken here at UMF have also had a big impact on who I am in general. After I became ill from just abusing my body with poor diet and activity habits, I realized it was time for a change. I started taking more health courses which opened my eyes to so many things that I never learned about during my years in K-12. Not to mention all the stuff teachers failed to mention during these years of my life would have been very useful information to know. Things like, balancing a checkbook and creating a budget plan and having healthy diet to exercise/activity ratio. These are everyday life skills

that we should be learning about throughout our childhood and even through our adult lifetime as well, but we are being robbed this education because there just isn't enough time. Some of my courses opened my eyes to individuals as learners, too. There was a time when I didn't believe that all people were capable of learning, my perception and understanding was skewed. Classes I have taken at UMF have shed new light to this issue and I truly believe that all people are capable of learning, they just need someone who believes in them and has the patience, compassion and understanding required to reach them. I could ramble on about many more factors that have shaped my personal philosophy, but I truly could continue on for days and days about it. As I mentioned earlier, we experience life as a series of events, this series of events is ongoing and never ending. Each event that we come to and the end result of it directly effects who we are, since these events are continuously taking place, we are continuously learning, growing, and changing. It is inevitable.

I think the two courses that influenced my opinions and perceptions of education as well as shaped my educational philosophy have been Practicum and EDU402. I got to experience half of what it is like to be a teacher in Practicum, and even just experiencing half of what it is like is powerful enough in itself. This course showed me how resilient our bodies can be to stress and pain. I got to learn about so many aspects of teaching that I never really knew about before. I think the most powerful memory I have from Practicum, which has impacted me quite a bit, was the suicide of one of my students. When I found out, everything stopped. I had no idea how to comprehend it, it was truly heartbreaking. He was so young; he had so much life left ahead of him, so much potential. It is crazy how things can change so drastically over night. That is just one way these two courses have opened my eyes to what teaching is really about. These two courses have also made me consider the idea of what my educational philosophy is. To be honest, it never occurred to me that these feelings and ideas of how I wanted my classroom to look and how I wanted to teach was my philosophy. I didn't think much of having an educational philosophy until I took Practicum. I learned even more about educational philosophies during EDU402. It makes sense, to have a personal philosophy of education, it just never crossed my mind that that is what

the accumulation of all my thoughts surrounding education is. In both of these courses we have had to discover who we are, truly, and how everything we are contributes to our educational ideals. It is more than how much you liked or disliked school; it has to do with where you come from and all the other aspects that go into creating who we are.

Throughout my EDU402 course, I struggled a lot with the idea of finding my true educational philosophy. We were given numerous resources that would aid us in the discovery of our educational philosophy including texts, assessments, discussions, and videos, yet I found myself further from a definite answer than when I had started my journey. The assessment I took marked me as relatively equal in the four main educational philosophies; Realism, Idealism, Pragmatism, and Existentialism. While reading through all four of these philosophies I found myself relating to all of them when it came to some thoughts, but disagreeing with parts of all of them as well. After we learned about the four philosophies, we learned about the eight theories that went along with the philosophies. Again, I found myself further away from the answer I was searching for. I ran into the same problem, agreeing and disagreeing with components from all eight theories. Lastly we read the Voices paper. This was my last chance to determine my educational philosophy in terms of an actual existing philosophy. As I flipped through the pages reading about each philosopher, my heart began to sink. I was finding myself in the same predicament. I would read one entry thinking this sounds good, but what is this about? Then I would move on to the next one and have the same thoughts.

It wasn't until after I had read all of the entries that I considered the possibility that maybe I should fit into one specific category. My students most likely won't. I am constantly learning new things about myself, learners, and the education system as a whole. I find myself changing my mind often about what I see as a great idea or what I see as needing work. I see my philosophy and perspectives going through this constant state of change, making it nearly impossible to define my exact educational philosophy. So my journey to discover my own personal philosophy of education, which has seemed to be a never-ending one, will remain as just that, a never ending journey. I don't ever want to be that

teacher that refuses to try something new or learn something new and I especially don't want to ever be that teacher that no longer has the passion in their eye, the hunger to make a difference, the creativity. Having a sort of integrated philosophy, if you will, can actually help me be an effective teacher, I think. Each one of my students will be unique, they will have their own philosophy. Since I have an accumulation of multiple philosophies and theories I can better cater to my students. I can think the way they think and be able to help them learn, comprehend, and master the material I am teaching them.

Because I have this hodge-podge type of educational philosophy that is subject to change throughout my life, I feel that multiple aspects of my classroom will be impacted in many different ways. As of right now, I have many ideas of how my classroom will look, what the atmosphere will be like, how effective I will be when it comes to teaching and leadership, and many other things. I guess I will start with my content area. Since health is such a broad topic it seems like there is a lot to cover and not enough time to cover it in. With a combination of multiple theories and philosophies I think it will make it easier to accomplish getting through all the material. Another way I plan on accomplishing this is by the use of Mass Customized Learning,. I really enjoyed learning about its implementation in Dirigo Middle School and all the facets related to it. I love that there is a teacher pace that sets the pace for all students, but does not hinder a student's ability. If they are ready to move on they do so, if they are not ready to move on they continue working on whatever it is they are doing. The use of Mass Customized Learning also aids in the process of individualized learning. With students independently working, the teacher can focus on providing one-on-one support to those who need it. The only downfall I see with the use of Mass Customized Learning is the amount of Technology Integration and the amount of independent work. Health is one subject that it helps to have group discussions about. You want to provoke students to have meaningful ideas and perspectives which is best done through group discussion, that way they can hear the ideas of their peers and grow from them. I am also a bit scared that the amount of technology integration being asked of teachers is a bit too much. As a person who is into health and recreation, I view technology as a large contributing factor to many risky behaviors and even illness and

disease. Video games have become extremely violent, parents allow their children to sit in front of the television for hours without moving, and some people act as though their cell phone is actually a vital organ required for living. It just worries me that soon we will be a nation that is so far into technology use that we slowly forget how to do the simplest of things because we have a device doing it for us.

My philosophy also will have effects on my classroom, in both the senses of organization and climate. If Practicum taught me one thing, it is the importance of organization. Keeping things organized makes for a less stressful life. Everything has a home and you know exactly where that home is. Filling out a daily planner helps you remember what needs to be done by when as well as reminds you of important upcoming events. I will likely have a highly organized classroom when it comes to supplies, lesson plans, and things of that nature. I want to have file cabinets and storage bins that make it easy for me and my students to access the things they need. Although almost everything will have its place in my classroom, the desks will not. I like being able rearrange the desks multiple times throughout the year. I always liked how exciting it was in school when the teacher said that we would be moving desks around or switching seats; it was a such a small change, but it had a big impact. I am all about creating a comfortable climate. The topics discussed in health are seen very much as taboo, a lot of people, especially pre-pubescent teens and adolescents, feel uncomfortable talking about all the issues that get discussed in a health class. In my classroom, I will support individual needs and creativity, but I will still ensure that students abide by the three main rules of the classroom; Be Safe, Be Responsible, and Be Respectful. As I said before, healthy can be a touchy topic to discuss every once in a while and can make students feel very uncomfortable which I would like to eliminate. I want students to know about all aspects of health as well as be comfortable and confident when sharing what they know about health issues. Since I support the idea of having meaningful discussions often, I must make sure that everyone in class feels safe and comfortable when listening to others and sharing their own stories, At the beginning of the year I will go over the classroom rules with my students. I will discuss the three major rules and just lay down a general understanding of what it means to be safe, responsible, and respectful. I

want students to also have the opportunity to share any thoughts they have about what the classroom rules should look like, which is a strategy I learned about Disciplining with Dignity. You lay down ground rules with your class and discuss what acceptable behaviors and unacceptable behaviors are. This way, everyone is on the same page and they feel more obligated to adhering to these rules because they helped create them. Another reason students are more likely to abide by these rules is the fact that they actually understand them. There is no vagueness to what crosses the line, students discuss all of it with the teacher.

Looking back at my own middle and high school years, I was not a very motivated student. I was motivated when it came to the classes that interested me, like gym, health, and psychology, but other classes just seemed to bore me. I think one of the biggest factors that led to my lack of motivation was the personalities of my teachers. When my teachers seemed to be motivated, I noticed that I would also be more motivated. I know that student motivation, or lack thereof, will be a situation I encounter frequently. I'm hoping my sense of energy and my passion for health will push my students to be motivated. I want all of my students to gain the same desire and passion I have for health, although I know that may seem unrealistic. I also hope that showing students how everyday tasks can be associated with their personal health will be a motivating factor. Sometimes it just takes one person to open your eyes and change your view on a certain subject. I hope that I can show students how important it is to learn about health, because there are so many aspects to it, not just eating right and staying in shape. I want to motivate my students to have a desire to further their education in regards to health and I want to do this in multiple ways.

It is important for me to constantly remember that all learners are different. How one student learns may be different from the way another student learns. Just like students learn differently, they show their mastery differently as well. During my Practicum experience I learned about the multiple intelligences and how some students are visual learners and others are kinesthetic learners and so on. I absolutely loathe standardized tests and grades for that matter. I see all students as being capable of



learning and expressing mastery of what they have learned, but we can't force them to comprehend materials in a way that they just don't know how to. I think assessments should express student growth in a meaningful way. Far more students have the ability to pass than are actually being passed. I will use my own personal story as an example. I cannot swim. If you threw me into a pool I would frantically flail my body around and most likely drown. Do I know how to swim, though? The answer is yes. I understand the concept of swimming, I could tell you all about how to swim, I could probably even teach you how to swim, but I cannot do the physical action. I feel that that is a form of mastery just the same. I understand the concept and I can explain in great detail the concept. I am sure there are people out there who are natural swimmers. They cannot tell you much about the concept of swimming, like how your feet and hands become tools to propel you in one direction, but they can swim nonetheless, showing mastery. I believe that assessments can be in any form that the student is comfortable doing. As the teacher, I will know whether or not the student has actually expressed mastery or not. This is because I have already mastered the content, what I will be working on is creating students who have mastered the content. I must understand who my students are and what they are capable of, then I will be able to see if they have actually mastered a subject or if they still need to work on understanding the concepts. Some students are good at taking tests, others are good at writing essays, and some are good at performing songs or skits. All of these things, to me, are appropriate indicators of mastery.

Two educational issues that I learned about that go hand in hand with my beliefs surrounding assessments are Non-Traditional Schools and Authentic Curriculum. Authentic Curriculum is a student-based learning approach. Students know what is expected of them and they work on learning and creating pieces that are meaningful to them. Some people say that a drawback is that it removes the responsibility from the teacher and places it into the hands of the student. I believe that this does not have to be the case. The teacher is still responsible for the students' gain of knowledge. The teacher works to help students discover what is meaningful to them, which I think is great. I want my students to be individuals and know that it is okay to be different. I also want them to find inspiration and passion in unlikely

places. This relates a lot to Non-Traditional schools. We learned about the students from Harpswell Coastal Academy who were eager to come to school every day and didn't want to leave at the end of the day. All learning was meaningful and creative, it got the kids up and moving and experiencing the world. Some of the students didn't even realize they were in school for an hour longer than Traditional schools. It is one of my hopes that my students become immersed in health, they become fascinated about all the things they learn about and class time seems to fly by. I want my students to be excited to come to class each day eager to work on whatever it is they are working on, whether it is learning something new or connecting its relation to their own life and I want students to be a little disappointed when class is over and they must move on to their next class.

Lastly, I would like to talk about teacher evaluations and their impacts on what kind of teacher I will become. When I watched the movie Teach, one quote really stood out to me. It was something Lindsay had said, her response to the question "Do you think you are a great teacher?" She replied with an "I don't know" and then added, "How do you know if you're really great at anything?" This was so powerful to me because I feel the same way. I mean, I hope that I will be a great teacher, but how will I know? Some students will see me as great and others will probably dislike my teaching style, although I hope that is not the case. It is my belief that there is always room to improve. One may reach a point that they refer to as the greatest they have ever been, but there is still a chance to be greater, so yes I may eventually be seen as a "great" teacher, but I will always have it in the back of my mind that I can be even greater. But, like I said before, Lindsay was right, how do you know if you are really great at what you do? I don't think we find this out with one subjective teacher observation done by the principal. I think it takes self-evaluation, peer-evaluation, student evaluations, and administrative evaluations. We need to be given meaningful feedback in order to reach our full potential of greatness and that is sadly not being done in many locations. This is due to a lot of factors, but I think it can be done. I think it is possible to receive meaningful feedback from multiple sources throughout the school year, not just an by using a fifteen minute observation here and there.

As you can see, there are a lot of aspects that have gone into creating who I am today. I am an aspiring teacher, yet I will always remain a student. I am quite indecisive in the exact determination and definition of my educational philosophy, but I wouldn't want it any other way. If I ever cease learning or being creative or discovering new things about myself, that would surely be the sad end of me. I feel like that is the definition of being stuck in a rut. When you feel like you have nothing left to learn, when you get into the mindset of this is who I am and there is no changing that, that must be awful. I want to never stop learning for I am a student for life, just as I have been a teacher for my whole life and don't plan on changing that now. I hope that because of my ever changing opinions that sprout from my journey discovering who I am and what makes me who I am, that I will never lose sight of what is most important. And to me, what is most important, is to be continuously growing as you move down a path of self realization. This goes for my own journey and the journeys of each of my future students!